

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ENZI). Under the previous order, leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will be a period for the transaction of morning business until the hour of 12 p.m., with the time equally divided between the Senator from Texas or her designee, and the Democratic leader or his designee.

The Senator from Texas is recognized.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, I yield 7 minutes to the senior Senator from Alaska.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska is recognized.

VETERANS DAY

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, it has been over 50 years since my good friends, Senator INOUE, Senator HOLLINGS, Senator WARNER, Senator LAUTENBERG, Senator AKAKA, and I returned home from World War II. When I joined the Senate in 1968, approximately half of the Members of the Senate were World War II veterans. While there are several Senators here who have served in Korea, Vietnam, and in later engagements, there are a few of us still around who lived through World War II. We are proud of a tradition of over 48 million Americans who have served in our Armed Forces since 1776.

Whenever our Nation has needed warriors to defend our Nation, young men and women in uniform have stepped forward, willing to bear that burden. This day, Veterans Day, is a reminder to us of their courage, bravery, and sacrifice.

These days, our thoughts are never far from a battlefield. New generations have answered the call to service, and as we meet today, they are defending us in some of the most dangerous places in the world, where they face determined enemies and terrorists. I join all here today in thanking each of them for their service and thank their families for their sacrifice.

I had the honor to serve in the Army Air Corps with a squadron in China in World War II. Our squadron motto was: We do the impossible immediately, miracles take slightly longer.

The history of our Nation's Armed Forces is one of impossible challenges and formidable enemies. But our men and women in uniform have met and overcome them on battlefields, and in the air, and on the sea and, as our Chaplain reminded us, under the sea, across the globe.

Secretary of State Colin Powell recently spoke of the tradition of service and said:

We have gone forth from our shores repeatedly over the last hundred years . . . and put

wonderful young men and women at risk, many of whom have lost their lives, and we have asked for nothing except enough ground to bury them in.

It is right and proper for the Senate to remember the young men and women who have served our great Nation in uniform and those who did not return because they made the ultimate sacrifice.

Veterans share a common bond. We are truly comrades in the deepest sense of the word, and I salute each one of them.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin is recognized.

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, as the country marks the Veterans Day holiday, I wish to take a moment to express my thanks to the people of Wisconsin and to our Nation's veterans and their families.

I urge my colleagues and all Americans to take a moment today to reflect upon the meaning of this day and to remember those who have served and sacrificed to protect our country and the freedoms we enjoy as Americans.

Webster's Dictionary defines a veteran as "one with a long record of service in a particular activity or capacity" or "one who has been in the armed forces." But we can also define a veteran as a grandfather or a grandmother, a father or a mother, a brother or a sister, a son or a daughter, or a friend. Veterans live in all of our communities, and their contributions have touched all of our lives.

November 11 is a date with special significance in our history. On that day in 1918, at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, World War I ended. In 1926, a joint resolution of Congress called on the President to issue a proclamation to encourage all Americans to mark this day by displaying the U.S. flag and by observing the day with appropriate ceremonies.

In 1938, Armistice Day was designated as a legal holiday "to be dedicated to the cause of world peace" by an act of Congress. This annual recognition of the contributions and sacrifices of our Nation's veterans of World War I was renamed Veterans Day in 1954 so that we might also recognize the service and sacrifice of those who had fought in World War II and the veterans of all of America's other wars.

Our Nation's veterans and their families have given selflessly to the cause of protecting our freedom. Too many have given the ultimate sacrifice for their country on the battlefields of the Revolutionary War that gave birth to the United States, to the Civil War which sought to secure for all Americans the freedoms envisioned by the Founding Fathers, to the global fight against nazism and fascism in World War II.

In the last century, Americans fought and died in two World Wars and in conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, and the Persian Gulf. They also participated in peacekeeping missions around the

globe, some of which are still ongoing. Today our men and women in uniform are waging a fight against terrorism and, at the same time, are participating in ongoing military operations in Iraq.

As we commemorate Veterans Day, 2003, we should reflect on the sacrifices—past, present, and future—that are made by our men and women in uniform and their families. We should also resolve to do more for our veterans to ensure they have a decent standard of living and adequate health care.

This is especially important as we welcome home a new generation of veterans who are serving in Iraq and in the fight against terrorism. Today's soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines are tomorrow's veterans. These men and women selflessly put their lives on the line as the countless military personnel before them whom we honor today. We must ensure that their service and sacrifice, which is much lauded during times of conflict, is not forgotten once the battles have ended and our troops come home.

For that reason, I am committed to ensuring that the Department of Veterans Affairs makes every effort to educate our veterans about benefits for which they may be eligible through the VA.

Our veterans and their families have made great personal sacrifices to protect our freedoms. Making sure our veterans know about the benefits they have earned is an important first step in starting to repay this debt. That is why I am fighting to overturn a VA policy that prevents the agency from reaching out to veterans who may be eligible for health care benefits, and that is why I have introduced legislation to improve the VA's outreach to veterans.

In addition, I continue to hear from many Wisconsin veterans about the need to improve claims processing at the VA. These veterans are justifiably angry and frustrated about the amount of time it takes for the Veterans' Administration to process their claims. In some instances, veterans are waiting well over a year. Telling the men and women who served our country in the Armed Forces that they "just have to wait" is wrong and unacceptable.

Last month, the VA issued a press release declaring "partial victory" in its efforts to reduce the number of pending claims. The release noted that the VA has reduced its claims backlog from 432,000 to 253,000 over the last 2 years. I am pleased the VA has made claims processing a priority, but there is much more work to be done. I urge the Secretary to continue this effort to reduce the claims backlog. The more than a quarter of a million veterans who are still waiting to have their claims processed, coupled with the thousands of new veterans returning from the battlefield of Iraq and Afghanistan, deserve the concerted effort of the VA and the Pentagon to process